

November 2003

CHAOS -- Standards Column

Pat Harris

NISO, pharris@niso.org

Follow this and additional works at: <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/atg>



Part of the [Library and Information Science Commons](#)

Recommended Citation


Harris, Pat (2003) "CHAOS -- Standards Column," *Against the Grain*: Vol. 15: Iss. 5, Article 35.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.4183>

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact epubs@purdue.edu for additional information.

Desperately Seeking Copyright from page 98

to have copyright education become a routine component of student and faculty orientation programs. Given the central role of the library, as evidenced by the **Outsell** data, we can expect the

responsibility for building awareness of copyright issues to continue to fall to campus librarians. As the early-adopters of electronic solutions and the resident experts on new media and copyright compliance, library professionals will further secure their position as an unparalleled resource for those engaged in instruction, learning, and research. 

Endnotes

1. "Dimensions and Use of the Scholarly Information Environment: Introduction," <http://www.clir.org/pubs/reports/pub110/introduction.html>.
2. Ibid.



CHAOS — Standards Column

by Pat Harris (NISO) <pharris@niso.org>

Dear ATG Readers: It is an honor to be asked to manage the Standards column for ATG. It is also a humbling to take over the reins from Sandy Paul. Although I have never fallen short in the footwear department, Sandy's shoes are hard to fill! Sandy has been a forceful and articulate "Voice of Standards" in ATG for many years and I will do my best to keep the voice clear and strong.

I will use this column as an avenue to keep you informed of emerging standards issues and standards developments that will have an impact on your operations and your services to users. Standards (or the absence of standards) make a difference. And, the standards that matter have an every-day impact. I want you to know more about how and why they make a difference by pointing out those "for-instances" where standards are important. I don't plan to do this solo, however. You'll be seeing other by-lines in the months ahead as I invite my colleagues to write about the standards work they are engaged in. Standards work is a collaborative process so at every turn, I welcome your feedback. Am I telling you what you need to know? If not, email or call. I welcome your feedback. — PH

Metasearching Exposes the Standards Gaps

Metasearch, parallel search, federated search, broadcast search, cross-database search, search portal—these terms are now everyday words in our professional vocabulary. They speak to search and retrieval spanning multiple databases, sources, platforms, protocols, and vendors at once. Why does this matter? Well, libraries increasingly have to compete with Google and other high-power search engines for the average person's attention. However, libraries can distinguish themselves as invaluable information resources if they can bring their users the metasearching tools that can delve deep into the digital treasure-trove.

Work got underway to define the metasearch challenges in January 2003 when a group of approximately forty library systems and services providers convened in an open meeting at the **American Library Association** midwinter to discuss how their businesses and their services have changed by the wide-scale growing use of metasearching. The attendees shared three major concerns:

• The impact of metasearching on system resources and performance

All reported that metasearching can result in

a large number of individual search and retrieval interactions between the meta engine and search targets. The end-result is that these multiple simultaneous search requests impact a single provider's server environment.

Metasearching in a Web environment is "stateless." This means that each search request invokes a separate authentication process. The authentication processes of content providers are resource intensive operations and consequently slow a system down. It was suggested that some gains might be realized by establishing conventions between meta engines and content servers in which meta engines established, "held onto," serially reused, and released "sessions" between the engine and search targets.

I note as one piece of good news that many attendees were enthusiastically in support of **ANSI/NISO Z39.50**, this community's landmark standard for information retrieval. Metasearching using **Z39.50** is "stateful" and alleviates some of the burden imposed by the stateless type of searching. Looking ahead to the next generation of **Z39.50**, **SRW (Search and Retrieval on the Web)** promises to enable a new generation of **Z39.50** search and retrieval logic encoded as **XML** and build gateways to **Z39.50** systems. This new spin on **Z39.50** could result in lower software entry and maintenance costs.

• The need to protect IP and product branding

Content providers have assumed that their content, whether bibliographic, citation, abstract, full text, full image, etc. will be displayed along with important information such as "branding" and rights use declarations. In general, a publisher's branding information has not yet been embedded in individual "records" so records retrieved via metasearching may not display it. And, even if this information is embedded in individual records, no conventions exist either to require and/or facilitate the display of such information via metasearch engines.

• Competitive advantage can occur from ranking and ordering of retrieval sets

Content providers have concerns about how meta engines determine the ranking, display, and ordering of content presented to the end user. If the meta engine imposes a preference or a ranking, to what degree are the content providers and the end users advantaged or disadvantaged? Would invisible commercial arrangements between meta vendors and content providers arise as a result? To what extent can or should metasearch engines have a content or provider neutral approach?

NISO Takes the Next Step

In May, NISO brought together its members to explore the issues raised in the meeting and to

Workshop panel presentations and working group papers are available at: <http://www.niso.org/committees/MS-workshop.html>

find solutions to the specific problems identified while metasearch implementations are still in their early stages. The planning committee for this event was co-chaired by **Oliver Pesch** of **EBSCO Information Services** and **Pat Stevens** of **OCLC, Inc.** Members of the committee included **Paul Cope** (**AutoGraphics, Inc.**), **Brenda Bailey-Hainer** (**Colorado State Library**), **Oren Beit-Arie** (**ExLibris USA**), **Brad Buckley** (**Gale Group**), **Laurie Davidson** (**Innovative Interfaces, Inc.**), **Todd Fegan** (**ProQuest Information and Learning**), **Matt Goldner** (**Fretwell-Downing Informatics**), **Betsy Graham** (**Innovative Interfaces, Inc.**), **Ted Koppel** (**The Library Corporation**), **Marc Krellenstein** (**Elsevier Science, Inc.**), **Peter Noerr** (**MuseGlobal, Inc.**), **Edward Pastorius** (**Gale Group**), **Sara Randall** (**Endeavor Information Systems, Inc.**), **Ed Riding** (**Dynix Corp.**), and **Jenny Walker** (**ExLibris USA**).

The goal was to get a group of community leaders to identify the long-term strategies and the immediate needs to support efficient metasearch capabilities. Specific topics to be addressed include:

- Authentication/certification mechanisms that would reduce performance impact without loss of security controls.
- A Web services model for bibliographic services possibly based on **SRW (Search and Retrieval on the Web)**.
- Vendor neutral methods for sorting, ranking, and ordering of search results from multiple sources and multiple protocols.
- Methods for displaying of branding information, copyright, and other intellectual property notices.
- Statistics and use measurement.

The **Metasearch Strategy Workshop** was held May 7 and 8 in Denver, CO. The meeting began with presentations from five different types of service providers—public library, academic library, ILS vendor, metasearch provider, and content provider—who described their needs, requirements, and goals regarding metasearching. Then, the participants worked in small groups to focus on the key functional areas that support metasearching. Each sub-group recommended strategic directions.

The **Access Management** group examined the whole area of authentication and authorization in a metasearching environment. The group agreed that existing or developing Internet-related tech-

continued on page 100

Wandering the Web — Selected Annotated Web Bibliography of Science Fiction and Fantasy Sites

by **Roxanne Myers Spencer** (Educational Resources Center Coordinator, Western Kentucky University)

Column Editor: **Jack Montgomery** (Western Kentucky University) <jack.montgomery@wku.edu>

Column Editor's Note: In conjunction with her presentation to the *Charleston Conference* this fall, **Ms. Spencer** decided to begin researching online science fiction and fantasy Websites. This dedicated, fan-driven genre and sub genre attracts among the most Web-literate citizens worldwide. Here are but a few stars among many of the science fiction-fantasy constellation. It is hoped that this bibliography will be of value to those who may not be familiar with the genre and wish to instruct or make recommendations for patrons. **Ms. Spencer** has a lifetime interest in the literature of science fiction and is a former editor for *Scholastic Publishers*. She is also a published author and poet. — **JM**

Random Sites for Sci-Fi Fans

1) **The Ultimate Science Fiction Web Guide** — <http://www.magicdragon.com/UlimateSF/SF-Index.html>

Authors, aliens, movies, games, and genres—these are a few of the almost 6,000 links provided by this science fiction-fantasy megasite. This site helpfully annotates the categories of links, such as describing genres by the link “If you like this then you’ll like that,” which features books by category, genre, or as it is referred to by the editor, “sub genre category.” Helpful hints include jogging viewers’ memories by book cover design. More than twenty definitions of science fiction are listed, which should make even the most persnickety librarian or English teacher happy. This Website is an excellent resource for the genre, although a drawback, common to many such megasites, is that site updates are infrequent and quickly out-of-date.

2) **Famous Science Fiction/Fantasy Authors** — http://www.adherents.com/adh_sf.html

This is an interesting Website devoted to listing famous and influential science fiction/fantasy writers, with brief mentions of their most popular works. The authors of the Website are clear in stating that literary merit is a secondary consideration after fame and influence. An interesting conceit of the list is that the author’s religious affiliations are noted in the annotated tables. The parent site, <http://www.adherents.com>, claims to be “an Internet initiative and is not affiliated with any religious, political, educational, or commercial organization. **Adherents.com** is the second most frequently visited general religion site on the Internet.” A color code clues the viewer in to titles that have won prestigious book awards for the genre, such as the **Hugo**, **Nebula**, **Locus**, or **World Fantasy Awards**. A link to science fiction/fantasy titles with religious references makes for interesting book club discussions, particularly for church youth groups seeking innovative topics to lure teen readers. This Website presents a unique

approach with a well-researched list of popular science fiction-fantasy authors and their best-known titles.

3) **Science Fiction and Fantasy World** — <http://www.sffworld.com/>

Searching this site could become a secondary occupation: **Science Fiction and Fantasy World** boasts “more than 10,000 pages of SF and Fantasy related content.” In addition to the usual discussions, author profiles, and book reviews of the genre, the site features books synopses, related poetry, interviews, and an art gallery. Viewers can vote on their favorite titles, and a monthly fantasy e-zine is available by email subscription to site members. The Website editors keep up with science fiction-fantasy genre news and a comprehensive backfile of news items should keep die-hard fans in the know on their favorite authors. The art gallery is a plus for many fans, and includes very brief descriptions of the works on display. An About/Staff page provides brief bios of the international editors of this comprehensive site. Minimal descriptions of each section’s contents may make navigation of this site a little frustrating for newcomers to these pages.

4) **Baen Books** — <http://www.baen.com>

To meet the needs of a highly cyber-literate audience, **Baen Books**, publisher of such well-known science fiction-fantasy writers as **Lois McMaster Bujold** and **Piers Anthony**, has created a Website with “added value” (which so many organizations scrambled to provide in the early days of commercial Websites). The WebBoard offers viewers a chance to discuss dozens of topics from manuscript postings for consideration to a forum for “Blazes”: Where we put hot heads to thrash out their differences,” to more traditional discussions of favorite authors, plots, and characters. The publisher, **Jim Baen**, weighs in on the WebBoard, too. A sure draw is the **Baen Free Library**, which provides, free, “with no strings attached” full titles for download in a variety of formats. And these titles are not straight out of the slush pile, either. Consider **Mercedes Lackey’s Fiddler Fair** or **Larry Niven’s Fallen Angels**. All in all, science fiction-fantasy fans will find this a useful and entertaining site.

5) **SFF Net** — <http://www.sff.net>

SFF Net has the distinction of being the official home of the **Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America**, the **Horror Writers Association**, and the **World Fantasy Convention**. Ardent fans will appreciate the thousands of author pages and several membership levels to the site for fans, professionals, and commercial vendors. The Personal Domain membership includes the use of virtual domains and unlimited email aliases. Among the discussion topics are writing, writing workshops, self-publication, and suggested books for

continued on page 101



CHAOS — Standards Column from page 99

nologies and standards should be utilized to address these issues. They recommended that **NISO’s** role would be to identify potential solutions and provide guidelines for how to effectively implement them for metasearching. The group intends to conduct a survey of the existing authentication and authorization systems and map those to various metasearching scenarios.

The **Statistics** group discussed how existing statistics might need to be handled differently when generated by metasearch related activities as what additional measures might be needed. The

Progress on the Metasearch Initiative can be followed at: <http://www.niso.org/committees/MetaSearch-info.html> [Metasearching Strategy Workshop]

group intends to link up with the leading statistics projects, e.g. **NISO’s Z39.7** revision, **COUNTER**, **ICOLC**, and **RLG Emetrics** to further explore possible approaches.

The **Searching Options** group discussed the existing search protocol standards and the potential for developing metasearch-specific profiles. Protocol candidates under consideration were **Z39.50**, the new XML-based **Z39.50** next generation (**ZING**) experiments, and the **W3C XML Query Language**.

The **Metasearch Identification System** group discussed how a metasearch system and the back-end system could identify themselves to each other so that system impacts and performance could be better managed. Several recommendations were made, such as a separate IP or URL address for a back-end system for metasearching and a standard identification parameter for the metasearch system that is transmitted to the back-end system.

The **Resource Description** group explored the possibility of a standardized collection description format and set of data elements that could be used by metasearch systems to direct users to the most appropriate resources for any particular search.

The **Result Sets Management** group discussed what core set of metadata would be needed to describe and manipulate a metasearch results set from multiple sources. They also considered how more than this core set could be delivered where information providers have additional value-added data.

The **Metasearch Initiatives** planning group is now reviewing the workshop recommendations, identifying those where **NISO** should take further action, and establishing priorities. Watch this space and the **NISO Website** (www.niso.org) for more information. This is work that will change the nature of our business and help libraries establish themselves as an authoritative and efficient information resource in this ubiquitous Information Age. 

<<http://www.against-the-grain.com>>